



News Release

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Contact:
Lena Dibble
The TRUTH Campaign
801-746-1621

UDOH Observes ‘World No Tobacco Day’ by Illustrating the Dangers of Smoking in Cars

Environmental Health Scientist proves there is no safe way to smoke in cars

SALT LAKE CITY – As part of World No Tobacco Day, the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) showed Utahns just how dangerous smoking in cars can be. They reinforced that—even with the car windows down—there is no safe way to smoke in a car.

As part of the event today at the Union Pacific Depot, the UDOH invited Stanford University Environmental Health Scientist Neil Klepeis to conduct a live demonstration of this particular health hazard. Dr. Klepeis, known for his long-time research on secondhand smoke, used an aerosol monitor to test the levels of particulate pollution—the toxic, airborne pollutants found in cigarette smoke—inside a car in which someone had recently smoked. He also indicated where these levels fall within the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Air Quality Index.

“In this demonstration, we have shown that peak levels of toxic tobacco pollution in a car can reach 10 or 20 times the worst outdoor air pollution rated by the EPA,” said Klepeis. “The pollution level in the car is literally off the charts—going far beyond the hazardous rating where air is considered hazardous to everyone’s health.”

The experiment demonstrated how rapidly these particles build up in a small, enclosed space. Within 20 seconds of the volunteer smoker lighting up in the car, the particle concentration reached “Very Hazardous” levels, according to the EPA Air Quality Index. Even more alarming? When the volunteer smoker extinguished the cigarette (and rolled down the windows) the levels were still considered hazardous.

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“Even with windows open, tiny particles become trapped inside the air of the car where a child may breathe them deep into their lungs,” said Klepeis. “These particles can cause serious, acute health problems, including lung irritation, respiratory infection, and asthma attacks.”

“Dr. Klepeis’ demonstration truly illustrated the dangerous impact of smoking in a car—even if it is only one cigarette,” said Amy Sands, program manager, UDOH Tobacco Prevention and Control Program. “People who smoke in cars should realize that this is not only a health hazard to them but also a major health hazard to all passengers in the car, especially children.”

According to Sands, more than 50,000 people die each year from diseases caused by secondhand smoke, including heart disease and lung cancer. “We hope this demonstration will encourage smokers to consider the health of those around them and not smoke in their car,” Sands said.

As part of the event, UDOH also handed out smoke-free kits with cards for smokers to sign, pledging to protect their children from the dangers of secondhand smoke by making their homes and cars smoke free.

For more information about the statewide tobacco prevention effort, please visit www.tobaccofreeutah.org.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public’s health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death; assuring access to affordable, quality health care; and promoting healthy lifestyles.